THE NIGERIAN CIVIL SERVANT AND THE ANNUAL PERFORMANCE EVALUATION REPORT: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract: The civil servant is undoubtedly an agent of government with a vital role in the implementation of the government policy. For this reason, he is expected to have the capacity and the necessary wherewithal to make government efficient and effective in all its manifestations. In order to fit in this task, the civil servant is annually assessed through the Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER). This report is expected to reflect what the civil servant has done in the last 12 months which will determine his promotion when due, his training needs, new schedules and other responsibilities, among others. The study examines the civil servant vis-à-vis the use of APER in the past, today and in the future. The study relies on documentary research, with in-depth interviews of some retired civil servants. The study reveals that APER is too general to satisfy the needs of evaluating the civil servant performance in view of different areas of specialisations. It concludes that APER does not have any major role in promotion, training of staff among others. It recommends that an elaborate APER should be devised with emphasis on competencies and specialisations. Elaborate quarterly evaluation should be made reflecting tasks, duties, schedules, added responsibilities, special assignments, special commendations and new discoveries or breakthroughs. Besides comments from supervisors, those from other stakeholders should be sought more especially in professional callings.

Keyword: Civil Servant, Responsibilities, Government.

Introduction

The civil servant as is the case anywhere in this planet is a worker that provides services or goods to the public in whatever capacity on behalf of government. In this respect and in many others, he is an agent of governmental authorities. In Nigeria for instance there are 812 governments recognised by the 1999 constitution consisting of the Federal Government, the 36 state governments and 774 local governments. These governments have more than 2,000 agencies and extra departmental authorities that employ more than three million workers. These workers provide range of services and goods that cut across all professional callings. Due to this varied callings and services, the workers offering such services have been named variously as public servants, civil servants, government workers. But of significance to us, are the duties they perform and what impact or difference it makes. Whatever they do reflect the image of the government they work for and the people they provide services or goods to. To the citizens, the civil
service must perform to their expectations. Therefore the civil service must deliver its service efficiently. The civil service is a complex organisation of functions, according to Kumzwam and Naanmiap (2005) in which civil servants and public servants follow laid down processes and procedures in their day to day activities to translate government policies into goods and services for public consumption. Civil servants are employed workers in their civil capacities. This meaning is not different from those working in the Nigerian civil services. However, there is a distinction between the meaning of civil service and public service in Nigeria. This also applies to the terms civil servant and public servant. Those whose appointment, discipline, promotion transfer, retirement etc, are under the various civil service commissions of the federal government or the states are the core civil servants. They are subject to the civil service rules and regulations including the financial instructions among others. Those working in other governmental agencies and the arm forces, Para-military agencies and other special departments whose appointment, promotion, discipline among others are based on delegated authorities and powers are not subject to the various civil services rules and scheme of service. Therefore they fall under the purview of public servants. The civil servants and the public servants are all workers of the 812 governments recognised by the constitution in their various manifestations and functions Akindele (2011).

According to the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, all servants, including elected and political appointees, armed forces, the judiciary, Para-military, boards, agencies in all tiers of government belong to the Nigerian public service. Of concern to this study are the workers-civil servants- employed by the Federal Civil Service Commission. Arising from the various professional callings in the service and the need to ensure that there is good service delivery and that those who take higher responsibilities are the best, the Annual Performance Evaluation Report was instituted long ago under various civil service rules. Apart from the need to provide necessary wherewithal and other facilities, especially assessing the performance, and promotability of a civil servant, training needs, placement have necessitated the need for APER the world over.

Objectives, methodological and Conceptual issues
The study examines the civil servant vis-à-vis the use of APER in the past, today and in the future. In other words, the study is concerned about the role APER has played in the past in arming the civil servant in performing his duties to the public as well as its role today and tomorrow. It examines the value attached to APER and the remedial actions normally taken to improve the civil servant capacity among other considerations. The study relies on documentary research, archival materials, including public service rules, civil service hand outs, journal articles and other
publications as well as the internet. In-depth interviews were also conducted with some working and retired civil servants. The internet was also consulted. This enriched the study, especially in examining the APER role in the past, the present as well as looking at its role in the future with hindsight. The need for frequent evaluation of personnel performance has been long recognised by many government agencies for better succession plans and efficient service delivery. APER is the process of obtaining, recording, assessing and analysing information about the worth of the employee performance. It consists of the obtaining information about successes, failures, and weaknesses in the conduct, performance, and productivity of an employee to determine his suitability for training, promotion or new assignment or posting. According to Patterson (1987) staff motivation, secession plans, attitude and behaviour development and posturing positive relations among internal and external publics of the organisation are some of the reasons for performance appraisals. Wilson (2001) opines that the need for accountability, corporate responsibilities, promotion, and training needs, retirement preparation and for the purposes of planning and budgeting are major factors responsible for annual performance evaluation. Monitoring standard, delegations of tasks, annual pay increase and grading are imperative for personnel evaluation Hall (2003). In spite of the necessity of APER in the progress of organisations and workers, it is trailed with its own problems which include strictness in measuring performance, a means of settling scores Meyer (1991), lack of objectivity and inaccuracy in the methods of rating performances Kennedy (1997). Riggs (1992) also reported that it has the tendency to damage teamwork, especially that supervisors are those that rate the performance of their juniors. For Murphy (2004) the most frequently use appraisals methods include the Management by Objectives, the 300 degree type, the behaviour observation scale and the Bah anchored rating scale, but emphasised that whatever type of performance appraisal methods used, they are prone to some forms of subjectivity. He suggested the development of regular and frequent evaluations carried out on specific areas of concern to organisations.

The Civil Servant and Annual Performance Evaluation Report
It is assumed that the relevance, promotion, training of the civil servant entirely depends on the efficient and effective performance of the civil service and the civil servant himself. Therefore the performance of the civil servant is measured on the basis of his work, conduct at the working place and his conformity with the rules and regulations of the service as well as public expectations. Even though there are ways in which government periodically assesses its performance and public expectations on what it is doing or what it has done or what it will be
doing in future, these do not necessarily reflect the civil servant performance or his conduct, but reflect the image of the civil service and to the civil servant. The need for the evaluation of the civil servant performance was indeed necessary. Right from colonial era, the APER was evolved as a way of promoting discipline and good conduct in the service, assessing training needs, and standing as a reward instrument—promotion. The promotion component is the most vital aspect of evaluation in Nigeria right from the onset, despite the fact that other issues in the evaluation were ancillary. In spite of the series of reviews of the work procedures, or general orders, or civil service handout before independence or civil service rules after independence and now public service rules, the essence of the APER was for the sake of promotion and must be rendered on all officers by the end of every calendar year. Section 3 of the Nigerian Public Service Rule is emphatic on this matter and states in rule No 06301: “The object of Annual Performance Evaluation Reports is to provide a full record of each officer’s work, conduct and his suitability for promotion may be judged by the Federal Civil Service Commission. In order that the commission may be in a position to weigh, in connection with a particular vacancy, the merits of officers, it is important that it should know precisely what work the officer has been engaged upon and the judgement form on that work. It is not less important that the Federal Civil Service Commission should receive an indication of each officer’s suitability for appointment to a senior grade in which he would have to perform administrative or supervisory duties; it may be the officer’s work in the appointment he holds gives the fullest satisfaction, but he is unsuitable for more responsible duties, and the Federal Civil Service Commission particularly desires to have a record or expression of opinion as to each officer’s suitability for promotion when, by his seniority, he may be regarded as eligible to be considered for such advancement.” PSR (2000) Section 06304 adds the necessity of supplying the fullest information in replying to questions in the APER form so that the information could be used for the sake of promotion without reference to anybody or the officer’s file or to any other documents. There is also in the form a provision that allows a civil servant who had filled the APER to vet or endorse or disagree with the comment of his superior or supervising officer. This, in the spirit of the provision is to allow fairness and objection in the annual promotion exercises being carried out by the Federal Civil Service Commission PSR (2000). The commission in exercising its functions and powers must also take cognisance of the comment of the officer under assessment. It is on the premise that no other yardstick could be used by as an instrument of evaluation in the promotion of the civil servant. And that the information requested in the APER is the only legal instrument accepted as at now in our statutes for the promotion of civil servant to the next grade level. The fact is that
the APER form has provided for the request of information about the training needs of the worker, his work schedules and other responsibilities, it was not meant to remedy his deficiency. It was purely for promotion. The civil service had used the information supplied by the civil servants for purposes of training and introducing new reforms in the servants for the working place to promote efficiency and better service delivery.

The Role of Annual Performance Evaluation Report Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow The role of APER in the past was very explicit. The provision for APER is only for the sake of promotion to senior grade level for a civil servant whose conduct, performance and discipline have adjudged suitable and on merit for elevation to the next higher level in his career. This annual evaluation is done in all cadres of work in the service. The questions in the APER are specifically coined to elicit information to allow the Federal Civil Service Commission to have the ability of forming an opinion on a worker about his suitability or otherwise in order to make a judgement as to his promotion. This, the commission has in the past, especially in the 1960's, 1970's and early 1980's exercised it creditably well. Even though, the APER form consists of many general questions that cover all cadres of civil servants, it was used purely for the promotion exercise. No other sources of information were relied upon in making such promotions. The judgements made on workers were partly their responses to the APER questions and partly the comment of their supervisors. The information was also used to promote training, planning, succession, creating new schedules, posting, deployment and redeployment of workers. Succession plans, manpower planning and development have been done in the past through information obtained in the annual evaluation exercise. It has also serve as a veritable tools for service delivery improvement as well as improving the capacity of the civil servant to cope with the challenges of providing for the welfare of the people. Today, the story of APER appears to be different due to a number of reasons. The number of workers today is legion. The civil service structure is skewed at the top, leaving few vacancies for competition during promotion. There also corruption, political interference by political office holders, neglect of the provision of laws and the public service rules and nepotism and other consideration such as the federal character principle enshrined the 1999 constitution's fundamental principles of the state policy. For these reasons, the APER plays a secondary role in the promotion of the civil servant. The APER form is still filled annually by civil servants as part of the obligatory rituals prescribed by the public service rule. Of concern mostly for civil servants that are not due for promotion to the next grade level, is ensure the notional promotion, which is in monetary form. Without filling the APER form, a civil servant is capable of losing the annual notional
promotion. This by implication will serve as a kind of demotion. Since it is done once annually, no civil servant would like to be excluded from the exercise. The revised public service rule has today introduced other consideration in the promotion of the civil servants than the information obtained in the APER form. For instance Rule 02702 of the public service rule states that promotion shall be strictly on the basis of merit from among eligible candidates. And that in assessing the candidates there should be several considerations. These include a clear distinction be made between the records of performance of the officers, their efficiency at the present grade level as well as their potential for promotion. The rest are seniority, conduct, availability of vacancies, acquired necessary and relevant skills as required by the cadres and satisfactory interview performance before an appropriate committee for that purpose PSR (2000). Besides, these criteria put forward in the Public service rule, aptitude tests have been introduced along side with professional qualifications and other academic qualifications. These have been introduced through different circulars over the years. For example, in some ministries, no one can become a director without a degree of the doctor of philosophy whatever may be his experience, publications and inventions in his area of calling. This provision is strictly applied in the Ministry of Science and Technology. In some ministries, one needs to have higher degrees to qualify for promotion such as Master of Public Administration, Masters of Business Administration or any higher degree irrespective of the field of work of the officer concerned.

One disturbing aspect in the APER criteria for promotion with these rules is that there are no clear criteria or guidelines that allow the assessors to grade those they are assessing. For instance what constitute good conduct and performance? Which qualifications are accepted by the government as professionals? There are occasions where questions for interviews and aptitude tests are set by those who are not qualified to set them and who are not also from the professional calling- civil engineers preparing tests or examinations for electrical or mechanical engineers-and so is the practice today. Therefore, today, there is lack of objectivity in the evaluation of the civil servant performance for the purpose of promotion as the APER form is no longer the instrument of promotion evaluation. Discrimination has also been introduced on the basis of professional and academic qualification, whereas examinations set without standards now play vital role in promotion. The role of APER with this development today has diminished. The issues of which professional qualifications will be considered for promotion have left many unanswered questions? And the introduction of academic papers- higher degrees are illegal because they are not known in law. Today many ministries and departments have introduced conflicting guidelines which defer
substantially from the provision of the Civil Service Rules and without a single method accepted by the government or a minimum standard in the grade and scoring of candidates. These, therefore make APER irrelevant in the promotion of the civil servant. With these trends, the future looks bleak for the civil servants in terms of promotion using APER model. The role of APER will continue to be relegated to the background with all the legal and illegal innovations. The Civil Service Rule provides that APER shall be the basis of any assessment for the purpose of promotion, yet the same document introduces other criteria that must be considered for the exercise. These appear conflicting, but legitimate. With this uncontrolled development, every ministry, department, extra-ministerial department forging ahead with new rules for promotion, assessment, relegating the civil service rule and rationality, then the APER and the civil servant may not be relevant in the promotion exercise. Ancillary services, such as, training assessment needs, productivity, succession plans, human resource needs and organisational diagnosis may no longer be possible through the use of APER.

Conclusions
The study reveals that the present APER form is too general to satisfy the needs of evaluating the civil servant performance in view of different areas of specialisation. It also concludes that APER had played an important role in the past in the promotion of the civil servant as it was the only document considered in any promotion exercise. It was only information obtained in the report that forms the basis of promotion. Today APER does not have any major role in promotion, training needs and organisation, personnel performance among others. Many other criteria have been introduced over the years which have relegated the APER to the background. Some of them can be found in the Civil Service Rule, while others are not known in any law of the land and yet take prominence over the APER. If the present trends are left unchecked, the civil servant and the APER may never get fair and equitable deal in any promotion exercise. The standard of promotion has already been compromised with many unapproved yardsticks in place.

Recommendations
The study recommends that APER should remain the basis of any promotion exercise. All guidelines, criteria for promotion should be provided for in the civil service rules. No ministry, department, extra-ministerial department should be allowed to introduced any criteria, guidelines whether under delegated powers or not unless with the approval of the Federal Civil Service Commission and gazetted. An elaborate APER should be devised with emphasis on competencies and specialisations. Elaborate quarterly evaluation should be made where necessary, reflecting tasks, duties, schedules, added responsibilities, special assignments, special commendations and new
discoveries or breakthroughs. Besides comments from supervisors on performance, those from other stakeholders should be sought more especially in professional callings. Where academic and professional qualifications are absolutely necessary, such should be clearly stated in the laws relating to promotion.

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